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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 001331

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PREF](#) [PK](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: INTERIOR MINISTER ON STATUS OF PAK-AFGHAN JIRGA
PLANNING

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 1094
[1](#)B. ISLAMABAD 608
[1](#)C. ISLAMABAD 298

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In meetings with Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher on March 15 and with Ambassador on March 19, Interior Minister and Chairman of Pakistan's Jirga Commission Afthab Ahmed Khan Sherpao reviewed the status of the Pak-Afghan jirga process. He described a collegial, cooperative mood at the meetings with the Afghan Jirga Commission March 12-13 in Islamabad, but said that much work remained to prepare for the jirga. The next Jirga Commission meeting will take place April 9-11 in Kabul. END SUMMARY.

Good Vibrations at March 12-13 Jirga Commission Bilateral

[1](#)2. (C) Interior Minister Sherpao told Assistant Secretary Boucher that he had a "good interaction" with the Afghan delegation that visited Islamabad for the Jirga Commission meeting March 12-13, emphasizing the "warm" atmospherics of the meeting. He has known Syed Pir Ahmed Gilani, the Chairman of Afghanistan's Jirga Commission, for a long time and was pleased with this "first people-to-people interaction" on the jirga. Sherpao expressed his satisfaction that the Afghan side agreed on the importance of lowering the heat in the Pak-Afghan relationship, building trust and goodwill, and dealing with differences through the jirga process rather than in the press. Sherpao said the commissions also agreed that the result of the jirgas should be the elimination of terrorism, especially Al Qaeda elements, while addressing the root causes of the problem. Sherpao added that the Afghan side acknowledged Pakistan's

efforts in the border areas. (Note: Sherpao lamented that President Karzai is influenced by others with different opinions. End note.) Ambassador stressed the current momentum shift that makes this the right time to move forward with jirgas: we are seeing locals' impatience with foreigners in their areas; warmer Pak-Afghan relations; and the arrest campaign against the Taliban.

13. (C) Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri touched on the Jirga Commission meeting during the Ambassador's March 13 farewell call. Kasuri hoped the commissions would, in addition to planning the jirgas, enhance grassroots links between the two nations. "People-to-people exchanges have made a tremendous difference in our relationship with India," he said, "and they should do so for Afghanistan as well."

Sherpao's Thoughts on Jirga Composition

14. (C) Sherpao told Boucher that the March 12-13 discussions focused on the composition of the jirga and its terms of reference. When Boucher pressed for specifics and deadlines the two sides agreed to, Sherpao equivocated. He said Pakistan raised no objection to a large jirga with national-level representation, although Pakistan had no experience with that type of jirga. "If they want 300 from their side, we can have 300, too," he said. When Boucher asked if Pakistan would only include traditional tribal leaders as representatives, Sherpao said they would invite "anyone who can help us." Sherpao later told Ambassador he

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thinks that the participation of prominent political party members and elected officials will bring credibility to the jirga process and will be a blow to those who want to create problems.

15. (C) Sherpao was adamant that outside observers should not attend the grand jirga, explaining that "for the optics" this should be seen as the "will of the people of both sides" and "outside presence could dilute the jirga's effectiveness."

16. (C) Sherpao also said that Pakistan is not opposed to using smaller joint Pak-Afghan jirgas composed of prominent people with local influence to help quell insurgency in volatile border areas. Sherpao sees this strategy succeeding if all sides follow up the jirgas with development work. Boucher assured Sherpao that the U.S. government is well-positioned to support these efforts.

Refugees Remain a Sticking Point

17. (C) Sherpao reiterated to Boucher that the Pakistani government will move to close four Afghan refugee camps this spring. He cautioned that the Afghan Jirga Commission had asked Pakistan to leave Jalozai camp alone, fearing that those refugees will go to Kabul, where there are not enough jobs to handle the influx.

Next Steps on Jirga Preparation

18. (C) The next bilateral Jirga Commission meeting will take place April 8-11 in Kabul. Sherpao told Boucher that Pakistan had committed to bringing a list of proposed jirga participants to Kabul, but he later told Ambassador that the two sides would draw up nomination lists after the April meeting.

19. (C) Sherpao could not give Boucher a definite timeline for when the jirga would take place. He said the jirga commissions agreed "they should hurry it up", but his tone

was non-committal. In a separate meeting, Ambassador urged Sherpao to work expeditiously in order to maximize the jirga's impact against the Taliban, acknowledging that the process is complex and time-consuming.

110. (U) SCA Senior Advisor Caitlin Hayden cleared this cable.

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